

Συνέντευξη στο ΒΗΜΑ

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Greece

1. In your opinion, how much power do women in politics have? Are there enough women in positions of power/decision-making?

There will never be enough women in politics and positions of power, as far as the natural 50/50 gender balance is not achieved in all democratic institutions and decision-making process. The representation of women in government (central and local), high public posts and positions of power remains low, placing Greece at the bottom among the members of EU. The results of the September 2015 parliamentary elections show 54 women elected out of 300 seats in parliament, (18%). At the last local elections of 2014, the results were even more disappointing. Only 15 women mayors were elected out of a total of 325 and only two women region governors, in totally 13 administrative regions. The case of the municipality of Athens is a worth mentioning exception, since a gender balance is applied at all levels: The president of the Municipal Council is female, as well as half of the 10 vice- mayors and half of the municipality Council.

Greece ranks also very low in terms of gender empowerment: 78th, worldwide, among 142 countries, according to the classification of the

World Economic Forum (2017 ranking). At the same time, neighboring countries of SEE have achieved better gender balance results: Albania 38th, FYROM 67th, Bulgaria 18th, Bosnia & Herzegovina 66th, Serbia 40th. It is evident that their European aspirations has contributed to extensive reforms and promotion of gender equality in all areas. Only Turkey is very low, occupying the 131th position.

Political participation of women, in Greece, does not follow the progress achieved in other areas. It is noteworthy, that women make the 60% of the university students, also in postgraduate studies and we can observe their dynamic breakthrough in all scientific and research areas. In the judiciary make 75% of the newcomers and many women occupy top positions. Employed women are highly qualified. For first time in history women are more educated than men. However, this has not reduced the gender pay gap. It is worth mentioning that women also show a great interest in art. The high majority of those attending theatrical performances, concerts and events of culture, in general, are women. This is a fact confirming women's rising role in public sphere.

2. How have things changed since you entered politics, for you, for female politicians, and for women in general? In Greece, in the EU, in SEE? Do you see positive or negative trends? How has EU accession influenced gender equality in the region?

Things are certainly changing. Slowly, but steadily. When I entered politics, in the 70s, after the fall of dictatorship in 1974, the situation of women was deplorable. I joined PASOK (the social democratic party), which was the only party to include in its declaration women's rights and gender equality. In 1977, I was elected member of the Central Committee with another

3 women (among them Melina Merkouri & Vasso Papandreou the former EU commissioner). Only 4 women, out of 60 members, were elected to the C.C.! My personal ambition, at that period, was to devote my time and my energy contributing to the efforts of consolidating democracy and promote my country's social and economic development. Actually, I rejected any proposal to run for parliament, apparently, because my self-confidence was very low and heavily influenced by the patriarchal culture, underestimation of women and men's supposed superiority! I was self-discriminated! Thus, I became active in the party politics, the trade unions and the feminist movement, while I was working in the telecommunications sector, also studying at the Athens University and having a child. An exciting life! It took me 23 years of hard party and grass-roots work before applying and being selected to stand for the European Parliament.

Few women joined the political parties. At the first general elections, right after 7 years of dictatorship, in autumn of 1974, only 7 women were elected to a parliament of 300 deputies. The new constitution of 1975, stated, for first time, that "Greek men and women enjoy equal rights and equal responsibilities". It was a great change! At that period, women's NGOs, which had been abolished by the colonels, re-emerged and became very active players. In 1976, Margarita Papandreou set up the Union of Greek Women (EGE), which was doomed to play an important role in raising women's awareness, organising women locally, all over Greece, and simultaneously exercising pressure upon the government to adopt and apply gender sensitive policies, also to appoint women in public posts.

Significant changes favouring women began to take place, after Greece joined the EU and

PASOK came in power, in 1981. The greatest change concerned the totally anachronistic family law. Many progressive reforms followed, since then, which broke old prejudices and stereotypes (marriage, divorce, abortion, etc.), problems which had been mostly imposed by the ultra-conservative and powerful Greek Orthodox Church. Progress since 1981 was visible. Women's self-esteem and confidence was strengthened, although faced with great resistance coming from traditional cultural practices, unequal distribution of family responsibilities, male violence and men's defence of their privileges. In parliamentary elections of 1996, 19 women were elected MPs (6,3%), in 2000, 31 (10,3%), in 2009, 52 (17,3%), in 2012, 63 (21,0%) and last, in Sept. 2015, as a sign of backlash, only 54 women elected (18%).

The situation has been bad concerning social partners, mostly dominated by communist and radical left. Not even one woman has been elected in the presidium of the General Confederation of Labour and only one at the Executive Committee. The Greek Unions have proved to be the most hostile regime towards gender justice and against any quota system. Actually, I cannot see any significant progress in this area since the 19th century!

Quota system has been very controversial, within unions and within political parties. Many parties have adopted quota systems for party organs and also legislation (law N. 3636/2008) has been introduced to ensure that 1/3 of the candidates, countrywide, should be women, in national and local elections. This measure has been of little help, since party mechanisms and old-boy's networks always find ways and means to exclude women. Neighbouring countries, not even members of the EU, have managed much better than Greece. Unfortunately, when Greece joined the EU in 1981, ex -ante conditionality on

gender issues was not included in the accession process!

However, progress in women's rights and gender equality is an irreversible fact, in Greece and in all SEE states. The integration into the EU structures and Europeanisation remains the main political goal. It is good, thanks to European Parliament's pressure, that the signing of Stabilization and Association Agreements, in view of accession to EU, require that governments incorporate the European equality legislation into their national legal systems and also actively promote genuine equality for men and women. The EU has, indeed, inspired progressive policies, which have modernized societies and benefitted women's interests and gender justice, against long standing hegemonic masculinities and old traditions, particularly strong, in the Region.

3. The gender wage gap has been growing in the SEE region in the past twenty years. What are the reasons and direct consequences of this.

Gender is an integral part of wage determination. Culture and history matter. This is especially true in a region such as SEE, which has been notorious for long standing conflicts and for a deeply embedded Balkan/Patriarchal/Mediterranean culture. The Ottoman legacy is still present. Patriarchy is institutionalized through legal, economic, social and cultural institutions. Both, culture and social habits, are determinants of the value of female labour. In my estimation, devaluation of women's work, domestic division of labour, dichotomy between productive and reproductive labour, gender hierarchies, patriarchal structures and pre-entry discrimination, largely explain the disadvantaged position in the labour market and the growing feminization of poverty, the SEE countries. The fact that the gender pay gap is

widening in the SEE region, is also owed to the international crisis, the prevalence of neoliberal policies and the inability of the region to respond by quickly reforming and adjusting to the new realities of the globalization and the fading influence of the Keynesian compromise, dominant until the early 80s, in the West.

Gender discrimination is incorporated in the wage structure through both individual employer wage practices and collective bargaining. It also reflects not only current processes, but also the weight of history on women's marginalization. Having children has a positive impact on men's wages, but a negative one on women's. Cultural prejudices regarding the relative worth of women's skills and collective bargaining power, have historically depreciated the value of the female human. Wage discrimination is not only reflected in gender pay gap but is also embedded in the whole institutional context governing wage policies, such as ranking of jobs, the system of jobs grading, or the principles underlying payment systems.

I have personally worked for 23 years in a heavily male dominated company-the Greek Telecommunications (OTE). Until 1983, women were only employed as secretaries, telephone operators and cleaners, even women with university degrees, and naturally they had different treatment regarding wages, promotion and pension regulations. This policy targeted to early exit of women towards retirement. Women's place was supposed to be at home, to support husband and children. That was the mentality, until the great changes in the 80s. Nowadays, with the country still sank in the economic crisis, the women who left their job early, making use of early retirement legislation, are in old age, poor and desperate. The younger women are faced with the repercussions of

crisis, mostly unemployed, or in part-time and precarious jobs. Women, in Greece, are paid an average of 15% less than men (on an [EU](#) level it is 16.4%).

The findings suggest that promotion of gender equality in Greece and the closing of the wage gap should pay attention to removing informal barriers to entry for women in educational fields traditionally chosen by men (e.g. effective careers advice, work-experience placements, matching of young girls with professional choices). It is found that subjects in which women are relatively over-represented (e.g. Education, Humanities) are also those with the lowest wage returns. Occupations, such as teaching, nursing or sales, predominantly carried out by women, offer lower wages than occupations predominantly carried out by men, even when the same level of experience and education is needed.

However, it is clear that there is no one cause of the longstanding gender wage gap, since factors involved do not remain fixed, but are getting reshaped, in line with changing economic, technological, social and political forces. Labour market studies have not fully theorized the integration of markets and capitalist system in producing employment segregation by gender. The contribution of feminist theory in this respect has been decisive, because examines both, unequal pay for equal work, and unequal pay for work of equal value (the low value to jobs that women do).

Gender equality legislation, as well as gender mainstreaming, are very important, but cannot fully address the structural and institutional dynamics that continue to generate gender based inequalities. What a gender mainstreaming approach can demonstrate is that dealing with the gender pay gap, through a purely technical process of legislation, auditing,

reviewing, monitoring and accountability measures will never be enough. This is not to deny the worth of those strategies, but to recognize that all strategies have limitations and no single strategy can do it all. Instead we need multiple strategies that are thought together, integrated through theory, as well as legislation and enforcement.¹

4. What needs to happen to attain full gender equality in the EU? Where do you see such changes being made?

Feminism and democracy are urgently needed in a world that is not working, is dangerously out of control and is losing a sense of what means to be human. First, and above all, we need a united and strong EU and to this end to mobilize women throughout Europe to regenerate, and adjust to an ever changing world, the socialdemocratic ideals of equality, social justice, solidarity and a fair distribution of wealth.

We need a European Parliament with more decisive powers, as it has been the main defender of human rights and gender equality, contributing to the adoption of the EU gender policy, even inspiring and defending women's rights outside EU borders.

We need to work towards a gender balance political world, in terms of policy, gender representation and stereotypes. Fight for the implementation of the already existing EU and domestic legislation and also introduce binding legislation for fighting violence, prostitution and trafficking of women. EU must tackle rising levels of abusive and irregular situations for thousands of women refugees and migrants. Sexual and reproductive health and rights is another important issue within the international legal and political framework.

It is also important to focus on all kinds of symbolisms of male dominance, as it is the ban of women from Mount Athos (the so called Holy Mountain), where only men are allowed to visit. In this struggle, men should also need to be mobilized and finally convinced that gender equality is a win-win situation and not a zero-sum game.

¹ Joan Eveline and Patricia Toddg **Gender Mainstreaming: The Answer to the Gender Pay Gap?** *Gender, Work and Organization*. Vol. 16 No. 5 September 2009 doi:10.1111/j.1468-0432.2007.00386wao_386 536..558